

The "All-Of-A-Sudden" Bridegroom.

BY FRANK J. PRICE IN NEW YORK TELEGRAPH.

"Hain't I done told ye, Lufe Pruitt, that I wudn't marry ye. ef ye wuz th' bestest man in th' county, or the best-lookin', which ye hain't nuther one. What d'ye keep pesterin' me fur? d'ye want me ter hate ther groun' ye walk on? I can marry quality folks ef I want'er, 'n I reckon ye know't es well es I do."

"That's hit; that's hit," answered the young man as he leaned across the rail fence and looked into the eyes of the girl. "Ther's hit, Melindy. Yer hed's turned complete sense that drummer feller staid a week at yer house when he wuz waterbound 'n couldn't cross White River, 'n ye pay no 'tention ter yer old frien's, er ever go out, unly when he cums to Blankenship's store, about ever two months."

"Well, what av et; hit hain't no business on your'n nor av Sara Ann's, ef she did talk 'bout me at Miss Mayfield's quiltin'."

"Sara Ann wudn't talk 'bout ye ner nobody, Melindy, 'n ye ort ter know hit. She totes ye laik a sister, 'n she hoped—"

The boy swallowed hard and choked. He was handsome, notwithstanding the girl's verdict of a moment before; perhaps the best looking man in the county, and certainly th' best shot. Honesty was indelibly imprinted on his face, and in his eye was the alert spark that distinguishes the man who is unafraid—unafraid of foes. But he was trembling in the presence of a 17-year-old mountain girl; trembling and almost ready to cry.

Abuptly he turned on his heel and left her.

Malinda Hargroves was something of a flirt, and she couldn't resist the opportunity.

"Tell Sara Ann," she shouted, as he disappeared behind a clump of bushes, "tell Sara Ann that I'll invite you uns to cum see me when I move ter Springfield."

Opinion was divided when Malinda Hargroves disappeared from her father's home near Big Paw-Paw Shoals a fortnight after her final meeting with young Pruitt. The girl's friends—and she had many in spite of her wilful tongue and high-spirited independence—hoped for the "best," and affected to believe she had joined the drummer at the railroad, and had been properly married to him later in Springfield.

The gossip—she had no actual enemies—looked wise, shook their heads and wanted to know how it was that nobody saw her get on the train. They recalled that another girl in years gone by had disappeared and when her body was taken from White River Dr. Smith had testified at the coroner's inquest that she had committed suicide probably because the true was approaching when she would be no longer able to face her neighbors. The drummer had been making regular trips, they said. He was at the Hargroves home a week before she disappeared, and it would be two months before he came again. It was more than half a year since he spent a week at her father's house.

"I don't no more b'lieve ther gal's in Springfield then I b'lieve Bald Knob's goin' ter topple inter White River," observed Old Zach Beasley at Blankenship's store. "n ef she is, I reckon she's wusser off 'n she'd be ef th' bottom uv th' river. Ef th' feller intended ter ack honorabl' why didn't 'e marry et home. Ther wasn't no obreshun. Ol' man Hargroves al-lays done whin Melindy wanted him ter. She jest wrapped him 'round 'er finger, the gal's maw bein' doid."

"What's Lufe Pruitt?" interrupted one of the company. "nobody's seed 'im sence Melindy went away."

"Oh, yes they hev," disputed Blankenship's young son. "Yes they hev; Lufe wuz in this here store day befo' yesterday, Ay

Ab Chenoworth whuther enybody seed him er no; Ay Poke thar."

Polk Hankins seemed to think an explanation was necessary.

"I never meant no harm," he declared, "nuther did Ab. Ab jest sed hit looked cur'us that Melindy never took no train, 'n I sed mebbiso; she wuz thet aukshus to git out't the sight o' folks she jest walked."

"What did Lufe do?" asked Old Zach. "He shuck 'is fist in Ab's face 'n sed ef 'e didn't shet up 'e'd breck 'im in two. Lufe's moughtly techy, 'n everybody knows 'e wuz caklatin' on mar'yin' Melindy hisself."

"What did 'e say ter Poke?" "Poke hung his head and the Blankenship boy laughed aloud.

"He sed," explained the youth, "thet everybody knowed Poke wuz sich a liar thet hit didn't make no differ what 'e sed."

"What's ol' man Hargroves goin' ter do?"

"Nuthin'. He's addled, my ol' woman ses, 'n she wuz over thar," volunteered a saturnine mountaineer. "'E jest sets 'round on shakes wuz'n ever with th' palay; 'E never treated Lufe—"

A shadow lengthened in the doorway and a silence fell upon the company.

Pruitt entered. He barely nodded to the group, walking to the rear of the store, where he conferred for ten minutes with the elder Blankenship. Then he stalked out, mounted his horse and rode away.

"He got two hundred dollars pap's been carryin' fur 'im, out'n the safe," whispered the boy, who had reconnoitered the situation.

"E's gwine arter 'er," opined Old Zach, also in a whisper.

"Ef 'e is gwine arter 'er," asseverated Polk Hankins solemnly, "ef 'e is, 'e'll foish 'er, lessen ther'll be a doid drummer in Springfield; you'ns don't know thet boy like I do."

"Ye needn't look et that thar telephone, Mister Clark; Pald'n gwine ter do y'u no good. I'd shoot ye down like a dawg ef ye made a move tow'd hit. Ye're lyin' when ye say ye don't know whar Melindy is. I know whar she is; I seen her axidently on th' street arter follered 'er th' Lyon House war ye're—ye're a' keepin' 'er. I seen the marriage license clerk, too, 'n found ye never tuck out no license; ye never meant ter be honest with 'er from th' start—but ye got to marry 'er."

Young Pruitt paused before he added, as if it were an afterthought, "ye got t' marry 'er, lessen ye're already mar'ed, 'n ef ye air, Gawd help ye; I'll kill ye then, shore."

Eugene Clark, the debonair drummer, now cornered in an upstairs room of the wholesale house he represented, was pale with the fear of death upon him. He stammered, but could not speak. There was something in the matter-of-fact tone and, above all, in the penetrating eye of the mountaineer that told him there was only a single avenue of escape.

"I'll marry Malinda—if—if she wishes it," he finally managed to stammer.

"Ef she wish," replied the youth. "What did she cum here fur? Ye promised to marry 'er, didn't ye; tell me thet?"

"Y—yes," faltered the drummer.

"Wall, I reckon she'll be ready, all right, 'n I've made th' arrangements. I seen a lawyer I used ter know when 'e lived et Folsythe, 'n he helped me git th' license. It's already at the lawyer's office. He sent fur Melindy 'n I reckon they're waitin' this mint with the justice of the peace. Come on—'n walk ahead, straight ter Jerry Havens' office. Don't look 'round, 'n don't say nuthin' ter nobody on th' way; ef ye do I'll drill a hole through ye."

Pruitt was supposed by the office force

to be an out-of-town customer, and the strangely assorted pair attracted no attention as they descended the stairs and walked single file into the street. Knowing the town, Clark led the way to the office of Jerry Havens.

"I protest against this outrage, Havens, and I'll hold you responsible," shouted Clark as he crossed the threshold. He had gained a modicum of courage in the presence of the lawyer.

Malinda Hargroves sat with face averted. If she had turned Lufe would have seen that her eyes were red. She had been quietly weeping.

"What's th' justice?" inquired Pruitt.

"Sit down, Lufe," replied the lawyer in a conciliatory tone. "I'm afraid—or rather I'm inclined to think—a mistake has been made here. We'll send for the justice if he's needed, but—"

"Air they already mar'ed?" interrupted Lufe impatiently.

"No."

"Then send fur 'im. This polecat's got in—"

"Lufe Pruitt!"

It was the girl who spoke. She had risen and her eyes were flashing. She was angry to her finger tips.

"Lufe Pruitt!" she shouted again; "do ye mean ter say ye think I been livin' with thet—thet varmint?"

She pointed her finger in scorn and haired at the unhappy Clark.

"He wanted me to. He tried ter skeer me, but I don't cum from no skeery stock, 'n when I found 'im out I jest went ter th' Lyon House and got a place in th' kitchen. Ye ort ter be ashamed uv yer-self, Lufe Pruitt, 'n ye a-knowin' me ever sence I wuz a leetle gal. I—I—thought you—you!"

Her voice faltered, she sank into a chair and cried softly. "I didn't know what Jerry wanted when he sent fur me," she muttered between sobs.

The ordinary lover would have taken the girl in his arms and soothed her. Lufe, straight as a ramrod, pointed his forefinger at the door and, turning to the drummer shouted: "Git outen here!"

"Melindy," he said after Clark had made a hasty exit, "Melindy, ye mus' go back home. Yer pap's wusser 'n he needs ye."

He was leaning over her. His hand was on her head.

"I—I—can—never—go back, Lufe, 'n be shamed," she faltered.

It was then that it came to the young mountaineer that he was master of the situation.

"Es my Mis' Pruitt, Melindy," he said firmly and finally in his tone, "ye kin go ennywheres in th' world. I reckon nobody ain't goin' ter talk 'bout ye. They all know me, Jerry," turning to the lawyer, "go git thet justice uv the peace, 'n whilst yer out take this here marriage license 'n hev th' name o' th' bridegroom changed."

MAXIMS OF METHUSELAH.

Being the Wisdom of an Ante-Deluvian Philanderer.
By Gelett Burgess, in American Magazine.

A flying machine is heavier than air, yet it rideth with ease upon the wind; and women are quick of wit, yet shall men of understanding prevail over them.

2. My son, he who hath a sister shall hear words more cruel than a camera, but he shall learn the truth.

3. And if thou givest heed to thine enemy, then shalt thou learn thy fault to correct it;

4. But beware the damsel who flattereth thee; and of her who calleth thee different, shalt thou have a care.

5. A man with small feet rideth them not, and she whose hands are well formed delighteth to play chess.

6. Why doth the virgin rejoice? Why readeth she her love-letters to her sisters? Behold, there is a compliment therein, and it shall not be concealed.

7. Enthusiastic is women's praise of a passable damsel; yea, they lift up their

voices continually saying, Lo, she hath fine eyes. But when she who dazzleth men's sight approacheth, behold their tongues are hushed, they whisper one to another in their confusion, confessing her comeliness.

8. As a man with his first automobile, so is an old wife with a young husband; she is fond, yet fearful.

9. The shop-damsel extolleth her wares, saying, Lo, I myself wear this kind. And the customer smileth bitterly, and turneth away.

10. To a clever woman, a man without audacity is a weariness to the spirit; and as for the timid one who obeyeth her, lo, she sendeth him upon errands.

11. Now there was a damsel in Assyria, and her name was Zerah, 'sich is to say, She who thinketh of her self. And she was enamoured of a youth.

12. And it came to pass that her lover journeyed into the land of Havilah, and he wrote to her letters daily. And every day Zerah answered him twenty pages.

13. And on a day he met a virgin, and he wrote to Zerah concerning her saying, She is very interesting.

14. And when Zerah read it, she waxed exceeding wroth, and she rent her garments, crying, Behold, he is faithless unto me; he hath deserted me for a strange woman. For thus and not otherwise would he call her interesting.

15. Therefore shall I arise and attire myself like a New-Yorker, and follow after him, yea, unto Havilah. And when it shall come to pass that I have encountered the woman, and if she be not more comely than I, then shall I chastise her sore and bear him away. But if peradventure she be more comely than I, then must I submit unto her, and go my way.

16. For a woman (but they are vain words) beauty is the sole adversary.

17. And when it came to pass that her lover wrote not for seven days, Zerah was cast down and would not be comforted; yea, was her heart heavy, and she ceased not from lamentations.

18. But on the seventh day it came to pass that there came another letter, wherein it was written,

19. Lo, for six days have I been ill unto death, and my pain was exceeding heavy upon me, so that I gnashed my teeth continually. And they that watched beside me marvelled that I passed not away. Therefore have I not written thee.

20. And when Zerah read his words she laughed a great laugh, and sprang up rejoicing, saying, Behold she hath not vanquished me. It was nothing but a sickness, wherefore is my heart glad. And she girt her loins and descended unto the city and bought a hat. And for the willow plume thereof she paid an hundred shekels.

21. A whip for a horse, a bridle for an ass, and a rival for the woman in love.

22. As an elocutionist in a hot parlor, so is he who repeateth the point of a joke; and as for her who sayeth, How much thinner thou I paid for this, she is like unto corn-starch ice-cream in a thick saucer, whereof the edges are bitten.

23. For two things is the earth disquieted:

24. For a man with a pale-blue necktie; and a woman whose corsets shew forth an horizontal line.

25. I observed a youth from my window, and, behold, he offered cigarettes to his neighbor. And his friend shook his head, and refused them, saying, Nay, they are rotten, fain would I smoke mine own. And I marvelled, seeing their love was not diminished.

26. And there came a damsel straightway bearing a box of confections. And, behold, she opened the box to her friends, and they partook of it gladly, saying, O, how lovely! But when she was gone away, then did they complain one to the other, saying, My, wasn't it awful!

27. Son, in my youth I walked by the banks of the Tigris, and I came upon a damsel kneeling beside a basin of waters and she was shampooing her hair.

28. And I said unto her, Hail, sister,